

DRESS LIKE A PRO(FESSIONAL)

Don't underestimate the power of a first impression. What you wear should accent the fact that you are a professional who is ready to get to work at a new job.

BASIC DEFINITIONS:

- **Business Professional:** When attending professional events such as career fairs or interviews, making a first impression is vital. For these events, wearing *business professional* dress is the most appropriate form of attire. Choose a dark skirted or pants suit, a conservative dress shirt, hosiery and pumps (closed toe with a heel).
- **Business Casual:** For less formal events choose to wear *business casual* dress. Business casual means *neat and appropriate* dress that is *classic* rather than *trendy*. Business casual for women means classic dress pants, a well-pressed dress shirt or blouse (traditional button-down, collared is often most appropriate), and a coordinating dress shoe. Also acceptable is a conservative skirt and blouse or dress.

BUILD OFF THE BASICS: Pieces Every Professional Woman Should Have

- **A Suit:** A well-fitted classic suit is a business necessity that lasts. Invest in a suit that fits and is of the best quality that you can afford. What seems like a big investment now will pale in comparison when you get the job.
- **A Blazer:** A fitted jacket completes a Business Professional look.
- **Dress Pants:** Select pants in black or blue fabrics. Look to avoid khaki material.
- **Dress Skirt:** Professional skirts should be knee length and conservative, not too tight or with too high of a slit.
- **Dress Shirts:** Button up, collared shirts can be basic white however this is a good place to add in some color and personality to the outfit. Dress shirts are also a less expensive way to multiply the ensembles in your professional wardrobe as you can change an outfit's look simply by wearing a different colored blouse or shirt.
- **Pumps:** Professional shoes should be *closed toed*, comfortable, and not too tall. A one to two inch heel is appropriate.

WHAT TO WEAR TO AN INTERVIEW?

There used to be a standard answer to this question: suit and tie for men and a suit with a skirt for women. But now that workplace dress codes have relaxed, both men and women have more choices when it comes to interview attire. It is important to remember that each company has an individual culture and environment. Try to find out what the standard is for the company *before* the interview. Ways to find this out:

- When you schedule the interview, simply ask what would be appropriate.
- Call the human resources department and ask what the company's dress code is.
- Sometimes an interviewer will tell you what to wear: "We don't dress up here, so a suit is not necessary"

Once you know the culture, a good rule of thumb is to wear something somewhat dressier than what the employees wear to work. This demonstrates that you value the job opportunity.

INTERVIEW COLORS

Conservative colors in various shades of blue and gray are best. Wearing black to the interview could be viewed as too serious. If you do wear black, consider incorporating another color near your face to soften the look. Brown is still considered questionable as a business color and should be avoided.

INTERVIEW FASHION BLUNDERS TO AVOID

- **Wild nail polish.** Extremely long or uncut nails are also to be avoided. Nails should be groomed and neat. If polished, clear or light colors are best.
- **Jewelry that jangles.** Jewelry can be used to bring attention to your face by having a higher necklace or larger earrings, but it can also be distracting if it is too bulky or you are wearing too much of it. Basic rules on this: no more than two earrings in each ear, three rings on both hands, and either a watch or a bracelet but not both on the same arm.
- **Open-toed or backless shoes.** Also avoid mules. Out-of-date shoes should be thrown out or kept for other occasions
- **Bare legs.** Wear stockings, even in humid summer weather. Stockings can be in neutral colors or a fashion color to match your shoes.
- **Out-of-date suits.** These have lapels that are too wide (three inches or more) or too narrow (one inch or less). A good tailor can alter lapels.
- **Short skirts.** Hemlines should be conservative, no more than three inches above the knee.

GREAT GROOMING: Looking Professional Doesn't Stop at the Suit

- **Hair:** Blow dry it straight or curl it. Try to limit yourself to using only moderate amounts of hair spray or mousse. Hair should be down or half pulled back. Nothing too fancy or distracting.
- **Face:** You want to look natural, but put together. Conceal circles under the eyes and use a thin amount of eyeliner to make your eyes more defined. A light shadow, and brown or black mascara is all that is needed for the eyes. A neutral blush and a small amount of lipstick will add color to the face making it look brighter.
- **Nails:** Well-groomed with clear or light color polish only.

RESOURCES:

- **Women for Hire: Professional Dress and Appearance:** *Professional dress do's and don'ts, season-specific career wear advice, style-adding advice and so much more.* (www.womenforhire.com/advice/professional_dress_and_appearance)
- **Quintessential Careers: Dressing at the Interview:** *Interview-specific professional dress advice.* (http://www.quintcareers.com/dressing_at_the_interview.html)

YOU look great, YOU feel great, and YOU will be great.
